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Why PSM changes over time: A longitudinal study assessing the impact of 'reality shock'

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Introduction

Public service motivation (PSM), or the motivation people have to contribute to society and to shape the well-being of others (Perry and Hondeghem 2008), is one of the most popular research topics in public management literature. The high interest in PSM is due to highly public service motivated individuals being expected to perform well since they are working to provide services that they perceive as meaningful for the community (e.g., Brewer 2004; Brewer and Selden 2000; Francois 2000). A large body of quantitative research exists investigating the effect of PSM on valuable outcome variables such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and interpersonal citizenship behavior (e.g., Bright 2008; Leisink and Steijn 2009; Pandey *et al.* 2008). Others have studied the antecedents of PSM (e.g., Perry 1997; Mayonihan and Pandey 2007; Camilleri 2007; Giauque *et al.*, 2013), the mechanisms beyond the PSM-performance relationship (Bright 2007; Leisink and Steijn 2009; Wright and Pandey 2008), and the conceptualization of PSM (e.g., Perry 1996; Vandenabeele 2008; Kim *et al.* 2013).

Despite this extensive research on PSM, still little is known about *how* PSM develops across time. We see a growing, but still limited, number of scholars who have picked up the invitation by leading PSM scholars (Wright and Grand 2010; Perry and Hondeghem 2008) to perform longitudinal panel (Braeder and Andersen 2013; Georgellis and Tabvuma 2010; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012; Kjeldsen 2013; Kroll and Vogel 2013; Wright and Christensen 2010; Ward 2014) or experimental research on PSM (Christensen *et al.* 2013; Belle 2013). This type of research is important as it helps to answer one of the most pressing questions in PSM research: is PSM a dynamic state or a stable trait (Wright and Grant 2010; Ritz *et al.* 2013)?

Interestingly, the results of longitudinal PSM research are complex. Some found an increase in the level of PSM across time (Georgellis and Tabvuma 2010) or after experimental manipulation (Belle 1013) while others found that PSM declines after joining the labor market but that the drop in PSM may be reduced by positive (public) socialization (Ward 2014; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012). Kroll and Vogel (2013), in contrast, found evidence that PSM is stable across time. Kjeldsen (2013) and Braender and Andersen (2013) went a step further. The authors included the characteristics of the work (type of work and employment sector, and soldiers' exposure to extreme stress respectively) into the analysis in order to get a more complete picture of post-entry PSM dynamics. They found different results for the different dimensions that constitute PSM: some increased, others decreased or stayed stable across time.

This means, some studies (partly) support the idea of PSM being a stable trait, while others demonstrate that PSM is a dynamic state that can both increase and decrease across time. An explanation for the increase of PSM is, for example, provided by Brewer (2008) who argues that organizational socialization is likely to be a crucial mechanism for 'transmitting a 'public institutional logic' and seeding public service motivation' (149). One often cited explanation for the decline of PSM across time is 'reality shock' (Kjeldsen 2013; Braender and Andersen 2013; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012); a phenomenon that has been observed among social workers (Blau 1960), nurses (e.g., Kramer 1974; Duchscher 2001, 2008; Delaney 2003), police recruits (Van Maanen 1975), and teachers (San 1999; Weinstein 1988). The argumentation is that newcomers who initially are motivated by their interest to help others become disillusioned by the

reality of their daily work; by negative attitudes of clients, complicated procedures, red tape, and lack of gratitude and positive feedback.

This study aims to increase our understanding of post-entry PSM dynamics. By investigating the effect of 'reality shock' on the development of PSM we gain deeper insights into *why* PSM develops. Traditional research on the nature of PSM primarily focusses on isolating socialization and attraction-selection mechanisms. These mechanism, however, cannot explain the often found decline of PSM after job entry. By using longitudinal qualitative panel data of newcomers at the Dutch Food and Product Safety Consumer Authority, we investigate whether a mismatch between the individual's initial job expectations and the actual reality at the work floor results in a decrease in PSM. By doing so, we pick up the invitation by Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2012) to conduct qualitative research which enables us 'to get closer to the causal mechanism underlying individual adaption processes' (p.22).

By providing empirical evidence of the possible effect of 'reality shock' we contribute to the current debate on of the stability of PSM, which in turn, has implications for questions such as whether higher levels of PSM found among public employees compared to private sector employees can be explained by attraction-selection or socialization mechanisms. Next to this, in-depth knowledge of the effect of 'reality shock' is also of practical relevance. It clarifies whether changes in PSM can possibly be influenced by HR policies.

Theoretical framework

Literature review on the nature of PSM

One of the most pressing question in PSM research is whether PSM is a unchangeable trait or a dynamis state that changes across time (e.g., Wright and Grant 2010; Perry and Hondeghem 2008). Deeper insights into the nature of PSM is highly relevant as it helps to explain the higher level of PSM that is generally found in public organizations compared to private organizations (e.g, Houston 2006; Rainey 1982 ; Steijn 2008; Taylor 2008). If PSM is a static trait, then higher levels of PSM among public sector employees cannot be the result of socialization mechanisms but can be attributed to attraction-

selection and retention mechanisms. The latter mechanisms are derived from the broader Attraction-Selection-Attrition framework (Schneider 1987) and Person-Environment Fit Theory (Kristof-Brown 1996). The main argument is that public service motivated workers are attracted by the public sector because of the opportunity public sector work offers to contribute to the public interest and provide meaningful public services. Research by Steijn (2008) and Lewis and Frank (2002) provides evidence for this argument; they found a positive relationship between PSM and public sector employment. However, since the results are based on cross-sectional data, there is the risk that the fit between public environment and individuals is blurred by organizational socialization processes rather than pure attraction-selection mechanisms (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012). Proponents of PSM as a dynamic state, on the other hand, argue that public values - which, following Vandenabeele (2010), are the basic principles of public institutions - are internalized or socialized, resulting in a higher level of PSM in the public sector. The results of empirical studies testing the socialization hypotheses are mixed. Outside of the PSM-research field, Chatman (1991) and Cable and Parson (2001), for example, found a positive relationship between organizational socialization activities and value matches between workers and their employing organization. Consistent with these findings, Camilleri (2007) and Ritz (2009) found positive correlations between organizational tenure and different PSM dimensions. However, also studies exist either demonstrating that PSM declines with tenure (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Buurman *et al.* 2009) or that there is no relationship between tenure and PSM (Naff and Crum 1999).

Two types of research designs that are especially suitable to increase our nature of PSM are longitudinal and experimental research designs. Even though Wright and Grant (2008) explicitly called for more experimental research and longitudinal research, the number of scholars that have picked up this invitations remains limited (Belle 2013; Chistensen *et al.* 2013; Georgellis and Tabvuma 2010, Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012, Kjeldsen 2013, Kroll and Vogel 2013; Wright and Christensen 2010, Ward 2014). The results of these studies are interesting as they again provide different answers to the question whether PSM can be considered as stable trait or a dynamic state. Belle's experimental findings demonstrate that 'PSM is a dynamic state, or at least a trait showing significant within-person variability' (p.150). Respondents in the PSM treatment

group scored significantly higher on PSM than the respondents in the control group Support for PSM as a dynamic state is also provided by Georgellis and Tabvuma (2010). The authors found that individuals who accepted a public sector job show an increased level of PSM for at least five years. Changes in the level of PSM are also found by Ward (2014) and Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2012). They found that PSM declines over time after joining the labor market but that the drop in PSM may be reduced by positive (public) socialization; such as participation in an AmeriCorps program respectively working in the public sector. Kroll and Vogel (2013), in contrast, found evidence that PSM is stable across time. Their findings suggest that working in private or public environment does not matter regarding the level of PSM. The level of PSM remained the same for both, employees in the private and the public sector. Kjeldsen (2013) and Braender and Andersen (2013) went a step further. They not only included additional environmental factors – characteristics of the work and exposure to extreme stress respectively – into the analysis in order to get a more complete picture of post-entry PSM dynamics, they also analyzed the development of PSM at a dimensional level. The results indicate that some PSM dimensions are changeable while others are unchangeable and that the question which dimension is changeable and which is not can only be generalized for the dimension compassion. In both studies, compassion decreased across time. Commitment to the public interest remained stable in the Kjeldsen study, while attraction to policy making increased. In the Braender and Andersen study, the stable dimension was self-sacrifice and the increasing one commitment to the public interest.

Summing up, experimental and longitudinal research on PSM is limited and provides mixed results regarding the debate on the nature of PSM. We argue that in order to develop this debate further and to make it possible to draw stronger conclusions, it will be helpful to focus on the mechanisms explaining possible changes in PSM. The longitudinal studies discussed above try to isolate attraction-selection and socialization mechanisms assuming that this makes it possible to attribute changes in the dependent variable – changes in PSM – to one of these two mechanisms. However, the often found drop in PSM, for example, cannot be explained by neither of this explanations. This shows that traditional research designs have their limitations. These research designs

allow to investigate *how* PSM changes across time, but cannot sufficiently explain *why*. In the section, we introduce the 'reality shock' which is often mentioned as one possible explanation for the drop of PSM across time.

Reality shock

The term 'reality shock' goes back to the work of Hughes (1959) and is linked to unsuccessful organizational socialization. In different studies, it has been used to describe the discrepancy between how nursing graduates understand their professional nursing role based on their education and the working reality they are confronted with when entering the reality of healthcare services (e.g., Kramer 1974; Duchscher 2001, 2008; Delaney 2003). However, reality shocks are not a unique characteristic of the transition from being a nursing graduate to being a professional; they have also been observed among teachers (San 1999; Weinstein 1988) and police recruits (Van Maanen 1975). Next to this, Dean *et al.* (1988) showed that accountants who switch from one job to another can also experience reality shock. This means, reality shock does not only play a role during the transition from being a student to being a professional, but also in situations in which newcomers' expectations which are formed prior to organizational entry – for example, during the selection and recruitment process or prior working experiences – are not compatible with the reality of the new working contexts. Fisher (1986) even goes one step further. The author argues that reality shock even may occur during an individual's career within the same organization; for example in response to a promotion in which the expectations are not met.

Building upon Wright and Pandey's (2008) critical note that just because public agencies can provide individuals with opportunities to act upon their PSM, there is no guarantee that they actually will do so, we argue that public service motivated individuals may experience a reality shock after job entry, resulting in a drop of PSM. Indeed, high levels of red tape in public organizations (Boyne 2002), lack of sufficient resources, vague policy goals, and formally circumscribed rules, regulations and directive from above (Lipsky 1980) or clashes between an organizational focus and a focus on the public interest at the core of public service motivation (Steen and Rutgers 2013) may frustrate employees as these characteristics of the public sector prevent that PSM can effectively

be put into practice. Individuals who expect that their job will make it possible to contribute to the public interest and to make a difference for society might realize that the working reality looks differently and consequently lose their PSM.

Study design and methods

Qualitative research is well-suited for developing complex concepts and making interferences about causations for a limited number of cases (Coppedge 1999). As it is the aim of this study to increase our understanding of the effect of 'reality shock' on the development of PSM across time, interviews constitute a suitable research method. In particular, we held two rounds of 15 semi-structured interviews with newcomers of a specific group of public service professionals. All respondents were recently employed as veterinary inspectors working for the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (*Nederlandse Voedsel- and Warenautoriteit*, NVWA). Their primary task, as outlined by the NVWA, is to protect three core values (public health, animal health, and animal welfare) and manage potential risks for society through consistent rule enforcement - at abattoirs and animal transports for example. The first round of interviews took place shortly after the respondents joined the NVWA – they were still under training at that moment (October 2013). The second round followed on average 15 month later (Spring 2014). We did not select the interviewees purposefully; rather we talked to all recently employed veterinary inspectors. Except for one interviewee, the interviewees had no prior working experience in the public sector. They either just graduated from university or had been working in the private sector as practicing veterinarian (Appendix 1 provides an overview of the respondents' characteristics). This means, we control for PSM found among newcomers potentially being caused by prior socialization in the public sector.

As in the qualitative approach adopted by Van Loon *et al.* (2013) to identify PSM, we started the interviews by asking the inspectors what they liked about their work and what motivated them. Other topics that we addressed were work and organizational expectations For example, we asked "What do you expected from the NVWA as an employer?" and "Did you have any prior expectations of the work as veterinary inspectors?". In order to learn more about the working reality, in the second round of

interviews we asked "Is the job any different from what you have expected"? and "Are there any problems you encountered?".

After recording the interviews, they were transcribed, anonymized, and coded using MAXQDA. The strategy for analyzing the interviews consisted of two phases: *open coding* and *axial coding*. All elements mentioned by the respondent as being motivating were coded with the general code 'motivation'. From the general code 'motivation' we were able to derive six sub-codes, distinguishing PSM from public sector motivation and other types of motives such as interaction and responsibility. We specified the coding scheme for PSM beforehand on the basis of the theoretical description of the construct. The sub-codes for the other types of motivation and work expectations were developed in an explorative way. In the second round of interviews, we coded all elements that reflect how interviewees experience their actual work and work context with the general code 'working reality'. The sub-codes of this general code were developed in a explorative way, too.

By performing axial coding in the second step of the analysis, we were able to research how PSM developed over time and what effect a potential mismatch between the individual's initial job expectations and the actual working reality has within this development. In the Appendix a list of all topics addressed in the interviews (Table A2, A3) and a coding scheme (Table A4, A5) can be found.[1].

Empirical findings

How does (public service) motivation develop across time

The results indicate that PSM is high among newcomers who just started to work for the NVWA. In the first round of interviews, almost all respondents (12 out of 14) mentioned that what motivates them in their work is the opportunity to safeguard the values of animal welfare, public health or to be able to change things for the better. Animal welfare and public health were often mentioned in combination, but animal welfare was most often solely mentioned (6 times). Other dimensions of PSM – such as the opportunity to

[1] The translations of interview transcripts below are our own; the original Dutch texts of the interview statements used in the study may be obtained from the corresponding author on request.

banish abuse, to come up for vulnerable people, and ideas related to self-sacrifice – were not mentioned.

> *I like my work and it motivates me if things get better…if I do this they comply…that you're making things better together with the people from the abattoir… that they listen to you… that they value what you say and that they try to cooperate (R14)*
>
> *Listen, I'm all about animal welfare. You can make a difference. That it happens quietly…(…)… I find this very important… not overloading trucks… It has to be done, everybody knows it, but it needs to be done nicely. That's one of my responsibilities, the best one. (R13)*

Next to PSM, public sector motivation (holding a preference for working in the public sector because of assets such as regular working hours, income and periods of vacation), task variety and the interactions with different stakeholders, but also practical reasons such as physical complaints, troubles with former employees were often mentioned as factors of work motivation. Beyond that, newcomers in the first round of interviews also stressed that the opportunity provided to develop their competencies had a motivating effect. This is not surprising as all interviewees were in the middle of an extensive training program. In the second round, holding more responsibilities was often pointed out as being motivating. This neither is surprising. All respondents who stressed a higher level of responsibilities as a motivating factor had got a promotion just before the second round of interviews took place. This raises questions concerning causality. Are individuals first motivated by the opportunity to develop and to have responsibilities and that is why they decided to a) apply for a job in which they are obligated to follow an entire training program and b) that is why they have got an promotion? Or is it the other way around? Are they motivated because they have the opportunity to develop and because they have more responsibilities in their new function? At first sight, the results indicate that the latter explanation works better. An increased level of responsibility is only mentioned in the second round of interviews as being a motivating factor and the opportunity to develop is more frequently mentioned in the first compared to the second round of interviews. However, if we take a closer look, then it becomes clear that the motives build up on each other and that only individuals who personally asked for the

promotion are motivated by the increased level of it. After a year of working, some interviewees indicate that they start to have the daily working practices well in the hand. This means, they do not feel they need for additional training in order to master their daily tasks and to feel competent and they start to look for new challenge in their work such as holding increased responsibility.

> *At this moment I have more responsibilities. I really do feel that I have more responsibilities and that I have to hold things together. That I have to get everybody on the same page. I experience this as a challenge. (R14)*

> *In the meantime I have become a veterinary inspector with managerial responsibilities. That makes working interesting again. If this was not the case I would think: well that's really it? (R5)*

If we compare PSM in the first round of interviews with PSM in the second round, it becomes noticeably that the importance of PSM as a motivator generally seems to drop. In the second round, five interviewees who initially indicated to be public service motivated seemed to have 'lost' their PSM when being interviews for the second time. Next to this, nobody who was not public service motivated when joining the NVWA indicated to be motivated by the opportunity to contribute to the public interest or safeguard certain values such as animal welfare and public health 15 month later. This finding goes against both the hypothesis that PSM is unchangeable and the socialization hypothesis. PSM does change, but it does not increase the more time individuals spent within the public organization. This raises the question why PSM drops across time among some individuals, but not among others. In the next section, we focus on the five individuals who have 'lost' their PSM, compare them with individuals who stayed public service motivated across time, and analyze weather a mismatch between the interviewees' job expectations and the working reality can explain the drop in PSM.

Why does PSM drop across time?: pre-entry expectations

For the empirical assessment of reality shock as a potential explanation for a drop in PSM, we first analyze the expectations veterinarian inspector have about their work and the organization prior to their actual working experiences at the NVWA. It is noticeable

that individuals who stay motivated across time have much clearer expectations with regard to the their future work as veterinary inspector and the employing organization. They expect that working as an veterinary inspector implies to know all different kind of rules and regulations and to enforce them in order to safeguard animal welfare and public health. At the same time, they are aware of the fact that they are likely to encounter resistance: that the people they have to inspect might work against them, or at least try to stretch the rules, and that much of the work has to be done solitary.

> *I find it very difficult to describe (what I expect from the work). At the one hand you hope that you don't encounter difficult situations. What you want most is that the exploitant follows the rules nicely. But the people also want to make money and that's why they try to stretch the rules in order to sell a little more. (…) On the one hand I find such situations challenging. On the other hand I am also a little afraid whether I will be able to handle this. I hope that I will have sufficient background through law and legislation, trainings etcetera. (R10)*

> *Yes. Really surveillance at slaughterhouses. Not only keeping an eye on it that everybody follows the rules and animal welfare is not put under pressure. I expect it to be some kind of mentoring of the organization. However not mentoring at the level of management but focused on animal health, public health and animal welfare. (R6)*

> *What do I expect? Running ahead of things. I think it is a disadvantage that you work in solitary. (…) You are working at a slaughterhouse alone. And you have to get up very early. (R11)*

In contrast, all five veterinary inspectors who 'lost' their PSM, seem to have no clear expectations of the work of veterinary inspectors. One individual indicated that she phoned two veterinary inspectors she knew indirectly in order gain a better picture. Another explained that she watched an introduction video. A third person mentioned that she had some expectations because of her father who also works at the NVWA.

Nevertheless, none of them came up with concrete expectations concerning the content of the work.

> *Not that much actually. I did not have any expectations. You can watch an introduction video on internet. Based on this, you see a little what they (veterinary inspectors) do. What they really do on a daily basis, I had no clue. This made the application difficult too, because I had no clear idea. (R3)*

> *What my expectations were? No! I would wait and see. (R2)*

> *Yes, that's difficult. Of course I knew my father's stories, but that's different from doing it on your own. I got a little bit the idea that you go and have a look to it that everybody does his work well. But concerning the real process. Actually I had no clue (R4).*

Summing up, the group of interviewees who stayed public service motivated across a period of 15 month, at the start of their employment with the NVWA, had a much clearer picture of what working as veterinary inspector implies in practice compared to the groups of employees who 'lost' their PSM. They were not only better informed about actual content of the work, but also about potential difficulties such as aggression and solitary at the working floor. The 'reality shock' as it is traditionally defined (the discrepancy between how individuals think of their future work and how they experience the working reality), therefore seems not fully suitable to explain the 'loss' of PSM. As individuals who lose their PSM do not have any clear expectation regarding their work, no discrepancy between these expectations and the working reality can arise. Rather, it might be argued that they experience a slightly different sort of shock. Perhaps not because of the traditionally expected discrepancy between work expectations and working reality, but rather because of the mismatch between their ability to cope with difficult work demands and the working reality. In other words, might it be that, because they are less aware of the potential difficulties of the job beforehand, they lack the ability to deal with troubles? And does this consequentially mean that this group of veterinary inspectors experiences the 'dark side' of their work as more stressfully leading to a loss of PSM? We will address this question in the next part of the analysis.

Why does PSM drop across time?: working reality

The fact that the NVWA is a large and unwieldy organization is experienced and criticized by almost all newcomers in the second round of interviews. However, it seems that this does not come across as a surprise to any of the interviewees. Individuals actually indicate that this is what they had expected. Nevertheless, they indicate that it is frustrating that every time they want to take up a task – every time they want to be assertive – this cannot be realized right away. Often it is not clear to them who needs to be involved in order to get things done and, beyond that, many

> *What I don't like? The organization. Our head of team is a great guy (…), but if you go further up in the hierarchy of the organization and you want to manage something there, then it's really is a weak public organization. It takes hours to achieve something – typical for government, I think. If you need something, first you have to fill in three applications and three people have to have a look at it. If you lucky, you will manage. But it is also possible that you have to wait for another three month. (R2)*

> *Well, I realize that the NVWA is a large organization. Sometimes this makes it hard to find the right people if you have a question. (…) Sometimes it takes quite long before you get an answer. That's why everything works slowly and that's a pity. (R6)*

Another frequently cited source of frustration arises from the lack of uniform enforcement. Both groups of interviewees – interviewees losing and keeping their PSM – indicate that they have a hard time dealing with inconsistency. In particular, they dislike having the impression that colleagues do not want to enforce the law in order to spare themselves trouble with the inspectee. They emphasize that it is very important that everybody moves in the same direction because otherwise the inspectors' authority is put under pressure and future rule enforcement becomes more difficult.

> *What goes wrong is that everybody has his own opinion and his own way of doing things and it is very difficult to bring things closer together. (…) For example, you*

say: 'I have warned them a couple of times, shall we enforce the law strictly now?' Then somebody else says: 'No, I don't want that! This would only make the company to act against us and I find that difficult'. (…) You cannot expect that everybody does exactly the same, but uniformity is needed! (R3)

A third source of frustration results from the attitude and behavior of the individuals that are inspected. In particular, it results from the impression that many of these people cannot be trusted, that they try to manipulate and stretch rules, and that the working climate is often tense. The extent to which newcomers experience this negative working reality as frustrating and stressful varies. Individuals who had clear expectations of what the job of veterinary inspector implies – that resistance might be part of it – seem to experience resistant behavior as less stressful and frustrating than individuals who had no prior working expectations. They seem to have accepted resistant behavior as a negative, but unavoidable, part of their job and found ways how to deal with it such as paying more attention to cover themselves or framing the interaction with the inspectee as a game.

Well, sometimes things happen that should not happen and that means that you have to award a penalty and that is not always fun to do, but it happens. But ok, that is what you expect and you just know that it's part of the job (R9).

At the slaughterhouse where they like better when we leave than when we come, I shy at. Well, it is not always easy that's for sure. But you just cover yourself even better. You just cover yourself three times better compared to other companies. (R15)

Interviewees who started to work rather 'blue-eyed', on the other hand, clearly indicate that they feel very uncomfortable about inspectees' attitude and behavior and the reactions to their work. They clearly indicate that this is against their expectations and that they feel upset and have trouble getting used to this.

I've heard earlier: 'you cannot trust them' [inpectees] and of course…at the end of the day; they talk. However, if you don't have anything on paper, you cannot

achieve anything. For me, this was a learning moment. Or better, this was really a surprise for me. I hoped that they would be honest all the time. But no! If their own interests are at risk, the manage themselves. Then they start lying. (…) At that moment, I was upset, very upset! (R1)

And what also disappoints me is that I have to get used to working in the business sector. That people manipulate you and are not honest. I have to get used to this. I tend to believe everybody. But they are just lying right in your face. (R4)

Summing up, the NVWA as a large and unwieldy organization, the lack of uniform rule enforcement and resistant attitudes, and behaviors of inspectees reflect the stressful and difficult working reality veterinarian inspectors. The bureaucratic characteristics of the NVWA did not surprise any of the newcomers and the lack of uniform rule enforcement is acknowledged by both individuals who maintain and individuals who lose their PSM over their first months of working at the NVWA. Clear differences are found in the way interviewees experience resistant behavior. Individuals with clear expectations of their work experience seem to be able to cope with it. Individuals, on the other hand, who start their work as a veterinarian inspector rather naively, seem to have much more trouble with dealing with lies and manipulations. They indicate to be disappointed and upset. This might provide an explanation for why this group of individuals loses their PSM – why they no longer indicate to be willing to contribute to society – while the others individuals stayed public service motivated across time.

Discussion and conclusion

We see a growing, but still limited, number of scholars (e.g., Georgellis and Tabvuma 2010; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012; Kjeldsen 2013; Kroll and Vogel 2013) who address one of the most pressing questions in PSM research: is PSM a dynamic state or a stable trait (Wright and Grant 2010; Ritz *et al.* 2013)? All of this studies share that they try to isolate socialization and attraction–selection mechanism in order to find an explanation for the higher levels of PSM that is found among public sector workers compared to

individuals working in the private sector. These mechanism, however, cannot explain the often reported decline of PSM after job entry. In this study, we focused on the question of how PSM develops across time and whether the reality shock – which is an often but not yet empirically tested explanation for the drop of PSM (Kjeldsen 2013; Braender and Andersen 2013; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012) – indeed can help explain decrease of PSM.

How does (public service) motivation develop across time?

Based on two rounds of interviews with newcomers of the NVWA it can be concluded that PSM is an important – but not the only – aspect of veterinarian inspectors' work motivation. Next to PSM, the contact with inspectees and colleagues, the opportunity to develop competencies, and extrinsic motives such as public sector motivation are mentioned as aspects of work motivation. This supports theory which suggest that different motives might be coexisting and influencing behavior (Le Grand 2003).

Next to this, the results show that PSM is not a static trait, but a dynamic state. As also observed by Ward (2014) and Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2012), we found that among our respondents, PSM generally decreases across time. Five individuals who indicated to be public service motivated in the first round of interviews, seemed to have lost their PSM 15 month later. This findings strengthen the necessity to study whether the reality shock provides a suitable explanation for the drop in PSM. Interestingly, we did not find any support for the socialization hypothesis. None of the individuals who entered the organization without PSM had become public service motivated 15 month later, implying that the higher level of PSM among public employees might indeed be the result of attraction and selection mechanism as Perry and Wise (1990) proposed.

Why does PSM develop across time?

The results of the analysis of the organizational and work expectations prior to the first 'real' working experiences (during the first round of interviews, the interviewees were still participating in a training program and thus were not fully working) are very interesting as they show clear differences between people who lose and who not lose their PSM. At the same time, however, they also show that the reality shock, as it is traditionally defined, cannot properly explain the loss of PSM. The group of employees

who stayed public service motivated had a much clearer picture of what working as veterinary inspector implies compared to the group of individuals who lost their PSM; both in terms of working content and possible difficulties. As individuals who lose their PSM do not have any clear expectation regarding their work, no discrepancy between these expectations and the working reality – no traditional reality shock – can arise.

Nevertheless, the results provide us with interesting insights as they help us to understand post-entry adoption mechanisms of PSM. Rather than the traditional reality shock, the results suggest that a different type of reality shock might explain the loss of PSM; a discrepancy between the working reality and the ability to cope with it. Individuals with clear expectations of their work seem to be able to cope with work difficult demands that show themselves in the resistant behavior of inspectees who are manipulating and lying. They indicate they either accept it as part of the job or frame it as a strategic game. Individuals without a clear picture about how their job will look like, in contrast, seemed to experience serious work-related distress. As resistant behavior comes across as a surprise, they lack strategies how to cope with these work-related problems, resulting in distress and loss of PSM.

This line of argumentation is in line with literature on occupational stress. In this field of research, the relationship between stressful job conditions and adverse employee reactions has been investigated (e.g., Beehr 1995; Spector & Jex 1998). This research suggests that active coping strategies can play a positive role in this relationship (Jex, Bliese, Buzzell and Priman 2001). Individuals who know how the working reality looks like have an advantage over individuals without clear expectations, as this enables them to actively find ways to cope with the demands of the working reality without losing their PSM.

Several conclusion can be drawn based on the results of this study. First, the results suggest that different intrinsic and extrinsic work motivations coexist. Second, they suggest that PSM is a dynamic state which, as demonstrated in this study of veterinary inspectors, can drops across time. Third, we carefully conclude that it is not the traditional reality shock that newcomers experience after job entry that causes the decrease in PSM. Rather, based on the results of this study, we argue that a different sort

of reality shock – the inability to cope with the demands of the daily work – might be a better, or at least additional, explanation for post-entry adaption mechanisms of PSM. Together, these findings contribute to the current debate on the stability of PSM, the question why the level of PSM found in the public sector is higher than in the private sector, and the debate on the mechanisms explaining *why* PSM changes. Finally, for the practice, these findings imply that, in order to avoid a drop in PSM, it might be valuable to pay close attention to the job applicants' organizational and work expectations in the selection process.

Appendix

Table demographic characteristics

Table topic list (first and second round)

Coding scheme (first and second round)

References